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TAGS: PREL MASS ASEC SNAR PTER LE

SUBJECT: MGLE01: A/S HILLEN MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SALLOUKH

REF: BEIRUT 1380

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Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The normally taciturn Lebanese Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh was almost buoyant in his May 5 meeting with PM A/S Hillen. A/S Hillen accompanied by the Ambassador spoke with Salloukh about U.S. assistance to Lebanon, and U.S. commitment to Lebanon in the wake of PM Siniora's April visit to Washington. Salloukh made a plea for more security assistance, and for a donors meeting for Lebanon. Salloukh assured A/S Hillen that Lebanon was prepared to play its role in directing foreign assistance to the most useful ends. Salloukh also expressed his pleasure at the Lebanese reception in Washington during PM Siniora's April trip. He said that after his discussions in Washington, he understood that the USG's commitment to Lebanon was strong. End summary.

¶2. (C) On May 5, PM A/S Hillen, accompanied by the Ambassador and PolChief, called on Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh. Salloukh was clearly in a good mood as he greeted A/S Hillen, joking that he had good relations with the Embassy even if he often had tough words for the Ambassador. The Foreign Minister continued with complimentary remarks about his trip to the U.S. as part of the Lebanese delegation for the PM's visit. Salloukh pointed out that he had sent a thank you note to the White House for the visit. "We really enjoyed these two hours," Salloukh said, beaming. He was impressed, he said, with the reception and with the President's personal interest in Lebanon. The Foreign Minister said he hoped USG interest would take a practical, material form.

¶3. (C) Salloukh said he had recently returned from the Gulf where the governments of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar had all promised to assist Lebanon in the reform of its security forces. He added that Jordan had also promised assistance to the military, and to the intelligence services. Salloukh acknowledged that the USG had promised spare parts to keep Lebanon's U.S.-origin equipment running. He exclaimed "We want more than that!" Salloukh promised that the Ministers of Defense and the Interior would travel to the U.S. prepared to discuss the real needs of their respective services. When the Ambassador asked if Salloukh was confident that the Ministers were prepared to do their part, Salloukh, showing

enthusiasm, offered to "pick up the phone and tell them to put pen to paper."

¶ 14. (C) A/S Hillen told Salloukh that the USG wanted to take a comprehensive approach to security sector reform and would include work done by other donors as a foundation for our assistance. Our goal, A/S Hillen said, would be to work with all security services to build teams across services. Salloukh said that teamwork was an important part of Lebanese planning.

¶ 15. (C) A/S Hillen thanked the Foreign Minister for Lebanese action on the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) (reftel). He said the initiative was more practical than other arrangements of its kind and offered a real direction for non-proliferation policy. Salloukh said that it had long been a goal of his to see the Middle East region become a WMD-free zone. "More weapons are not in our interest," Salloukh said. He added that Lebanon's Ambassador to Poland would represent the GOL at the upcoming Warsaw meeting on PSI.

¶ 16. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question about a recent incident in which Syrian border troops crossed into Lebanon, Salloukh said, "We must sit together and discuss these things." He said there were many spots along the border where Syria and Lebanon have territorial disputes. The disagreements usually only inconvenience farmers and smugglers who use the gaps in border posts to move contraband back and forth. A bilateral committee looks after these issues and settles them at the grassroots level. The Foreign Minister said he did not know why Syria would pick this particular time to improve border posts.

¶ 17. (C) When A/S Hillen asked the Foreign Minister how the USG might help Lebanon, Salloukh was direct in his response. He said Lebanon needs financial support from the international community. The proposed Beirut donors'

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conference on Lebanon's economic reform agenda will be an important event for Lebanon, he said. The Minister was uncertain as to the timing of the donors' conference. He said the economic reform measures had to be submitted to the Council of Ministers, and then sent to parliament for technical discussions before being considered by the full parliament. Salloukh said it was important for the ministers to discuss the plan broadly before it became an issue on the streets. In an effort to win popular support, Salloukh said, the ministers were traveling around the country, speaking with the press, and communicating with foreign capitals to explain the reform program. The Ambassador raised the threat of anti-reform demonstrations being discussed for May 10. Salloukh said he did not know how the labor demonstrations might proceed, but the PM was in contact with labor leaders to head off street confrontations.

¶ 18. (C) A/S Hillen said the USG had high hopes that the national dialogue preprocess would have some positive results on the local political scene. The Ambassador added that the dialogue had made laudable progress on Palestinian arms, but asked what the next steps would be. Salloukh said he had brought the Palestinian issue to the PM's attention. This issue, he said, was the root of all troubles in the region and must be solved by the international community. First, Salloukh pointed out, it would be necessary to stop the Israeli "incursions" into Lebanese airspace. The Foreign Minister noted that the recent increase in Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory was not warranted by Hizballah actions along the common border. Hizballah, he said, has been quiet for months. The Israelis must consider the available, alternative peace plans. Salloukh claimed that the Arab initiative from the April 2002 Arab Summit in Beirut offered Israeli peace on a "diamond platter"

¶ 19. (C) Comment: Salloukh, while claiming to be non-partisan, owes his position to a green light from

Hizballah. Whatever his Shia loyalties, in this meeting he showed no reticence to accept assistance from the USG. On this occasion, Salloukh was more positively disposed toward U.S. officials than we have seen since he took office. End Comment.

¶10. (U) This message has been cleared by A/S Hillen.  
FELTMAN